

Mary, Mother of Jesus Church  
Adult Faith Formation – Lent 2022  
The Apocalypse or The Revelation to John  
Week 2 – The Oracles to the Seven Churches of Asia

### Background on the 7 Letters (Oracles)

- True state of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century church is not totally as Luke presents it in Acts 2: 42-47
- Observance of The Law for early Christians was still an issue
- All 7 churches located in modern-day Turkey
- All 7 letters follow the same format with 6 distinct elements: 1) instruction to John; 2) introduction by Christ; 3) the commendation; 4) the condemnation; 5) the remedy; and 6) the reward
- All 7 letters begin: “to the angel of the church in....”
- GK “angelus” used in 2 ways in NT: guardian angel or bishop
- All commendations (3<sup>rd</sup> element) begin “I know....”

### The Church at Ephesus (Chapter 2: 1-7)

#### Ephesus

- Large and important early church
- Acts 19: most successful of Paul’s missionary journeys

#### Introduction

- One who holds 7 stars in his right hand and walks in the midst of 7 gold lampstands

#### Commendation (I know...)

- Hard work, endurance, suffered for Christ, loyal to doctrine, tested those who claimed to be apostles, hated those who followed the Nicolaitans

#### Condemnation

- Love for one another is weak
- Lost the original love and fervor for the gospel
- Infiltrating of groups like the Nicolaitans

#### The Remedy (REPENT)

- Rekindle the original love for Christ and each other
- Do the works that you first did

#### The Reward (to the Victor)

- The right to eat from the fruit of the tree of life in the new Jerusalem

#### Contemporary Application

- Has the church lost its love (and enthusiasm) for Christ?
- Does the family of the church truly love one another?

### The Church at Smyrna (Chapter 2: 8-11)

#### Smyrna

- Center of imperial cult: first temple in Asia for emperor worship
- St. Polycarp (Bishop of Smyrna) martyred there in 155 CE

#### Introduction

- The first and last; who once died but came to life

#### The Commendation (I know...)

- Tribulations (GK=*thilipsis*) = affliction, hardship
- Poverty (lower economic rank)
- Slander and abuse by members of the “Assembly of Satan” (Jews)
- Though you suffer, do not be afraid

#### The Condemnation

- Smyrna is one of two of the 7 churches given no condemnation

#### The Reward (to the Victor)

- Remain faithful unto death and you will receive the crown of life

#### Contemporary Application

- Faithful in small things
- Difficulties can be used to glorify God

### The Church at Pergamum (Chapter 2: 12-17)

#### Pergamum

- Center of pagan religions: Athena was patroness of the city
- City had a library second only to Alexandria
- Home to Galen (d. 199 CE) “father of anatomy”
- Walled acropolis 1300’ above the city; Temple to Zeus overlooked the city

#### The Introduction

- The one with the sharp two-edged sword

#### The Commendation (I know...)

- You live close to Satan’s throne, but resist pressure to engage in false worship
- You have not denied your faith even when Antipas (Bishop of Smyrna) was martyred

#### The Condemnation

- Some hold to teachings of Balaam
- Some hold to teachings of the Nicolaitans
- Antinomianism = heretical doctrine that once one has been saved by faith they are not bound to follow any moral code, teachings of The Law, or social/religious norms (“once saved always saved”)

#### The Remedy (REPENT)

- The whole church is held accountable for the actions of a few (“my brother’ keeper”)
- The church must uphold the standards of faith and morality
- Christ will strike those who do not uphold the standards with the sharp, two-edged sword

#### The Reward (to the Victor)

- The Victor will be given 3 tokens:
  - 1) hidden manna
  - 2) white amulet (stone)
  - 3) new name known only to the receiver

#### Contemporary Application

- Is idolatry obsolete?
- What is idolatry?

## The Church at Thyatira (Chapter 2: 18-29)

### Thyatira

- Smallest church and least of the 7
- Lydia (merchant of purple cloth and Paul's first convert) was from this town
- Known for its trade guilds and the social/pagan events associated with them
- Apollo (sun god) was the chief deity of the town

### The Introduction

- The Son of God whose eyes are like a fiery flame and whose feet are like polished brass (strong introduction not found anywhere else)
- He is a judge whose very appearance threatens the sinner

### The Commendation

- Works, faith, endurance (the latest works are greater than the first, church progressing)
- Service=GK *diakonia* = works of charity toward the poor members of this church

### The Condemnation

- You allow "Jezebel" (who calls herself a prophetess from God but is a harlot) to teach and mislead my people
- You follow her in eating food sacrificed to idols and in "playing the harlot"
- The church tolerates false teachers
- Christ gives the sternest warnings to those who lead (or teach)
- "I will give each of you what your works deserve"

### The Remedy (REPENT)

- "Jezebel" and her followers are judged and punished in the present time
- Those who have not followed this teaching (and know nothing of the "deep secrets of Satan", I will place no further burden on you

### The Reward (to the Victor)

- Authority over the nations and will be given the morning star

### Contemporary Application

- Does God judge and punish in the present time?
- Judgment that expresses God's definitive verdict
- Judgment that leads to change and conversion
- Judgment that is in truth an act of mercy
- God does not desire bad things for us, but permits and uses for good
- Sirach: 38: 9-14 Regarding sickness:
  - 1) pray for healing
  - 2) repent of sin
  - 3) make an offering to God
  - 4) go to the doctor
- In this order!
- Although we are saved by grace, we must respond with appropriate conduct

## The Church at Sardis (Chapter 3: 1-6)

### Sardis

- Very wealthy city, prosperous
- Jewish community was large, wealthy, and had a beautiful synagogue

### The Introduction

- The one who has the 7 spirits of God and the 7 stars

### The Commendation (I know...)

- there really is no commendation (the positive appearance of the church is an illusion)
- Church has the reputation of being a vital and active church
- Appears to both pagans and Jews to be a vital community of devout Christians
- Rich liturgy
- Growing membership
- Esteemed in the community
- Generous to the needs of others

### The Condemnation

- In reality, the church is dead
- Deceived into self-satisfaction
- Your works are not complete in the sight of God

### The Remedy (REPENT)

- Wake up!!
- Be watchful and strengthen what is left
- If you do not, I will come as a thief in the night and you will not know what has happened

### The Reward (to the Victor)

- Those among you who have not “soiled their garments” will walk with me, dressed in white, because they are worthy
- I will never erase their names from the Book of Life and I will acknowledge them in the presence of my Father and his angels

### Contemporary Application

- Patterns of apathy and sin
- The church must watch its conduct

## The Church at Philadelphia (Chapter 3: 7-13)

### Philadelphia

- Prosperous commercial city
- Intersection of 2 major trade routes

### The Introduction

- The Holy One (Isaiah’s “Holy One of Israel”)
- The one who holds the key of David
- Who opens and no one shall close
- Who closes and no one shall open

### The Commendation

- You have limited strength but you have kept my word and have not denied my name
- I have left an open door before you that no one can close

- Philadelphia is in conflict with the local Jewish community and the Christians have been banned from the synagogue. But Christ has opened the door and they cannot be excluded

#### The Condemnation

- There is no condemnation for the church at Philadelphia but rather for the Jews
- Those of the “Assembly of Satan” (the synagogue) who claim to be devout Jews but are not because they have mistreated their fellow Jewish Christians

#### The Remedy (REPENT)

- The Jews of the synagogue must repent
- They will be humiliated and must pay homage to the Jewish Christians
- Christ will keep the Jewish Christians safe through their trials
- Mistranslation of the GK...says “kept my message of endurance” should read “kept the message of my endurance.” The church has embraced the sufferings of Christ on the cross

#### The Reward (to the Victor)

- The victor will be a pillar in the Temple and will be inscribed with the name of God, the city of God (the New Jerusalem), and the new name of Christ.

#### Contemporary Application

- Are people still rejected by the church?

### The Church at Laodicia (Chapter 3: 14-22)

#### Laodicia

- Banking center, citizens were very wealthy
- Bred sheep to make a rich glossy black wool known throughout the world
- Renowned medical school, known for treatment of eye disease “Phrygian powder”
- Worst water system in the region: water came from aqueduct 6 mls. South; water was lukewarm, dirty, undrinkable, and would make one sick

#### The Introduction

- The Amen (title for God in OT)
- The faithful and true witness
- The source of God’s creation (GK=*arché* = origin)
- The role of the pre-incarnate Christ in creation (Col. 1: 18)

#### The Commendation

- There is no commendation for the church at Laodicia

#### The Condemnation

- Neither cold nor hot (Christ wishes for one or the other) but lukewarm
- Smug complacency
- They make him sick
- Christ uses 5 words to describe the church
  - Wretched
  - Pitiably
  - Poor
  - Blind
  - Naked
- Harshest warning than that of any of the other churches

### The Remedy (REPENT)

- “I will spit you out of my mouth” (GK=*emeö* = to vomit)
- They must buy from him what they need (3 things)
  - 1) gold refined by fire = faith in Christ purified by trial
  - 2) white garment = symbolic of pure and righteous conduct
  - 3) Ointment to be able to see = the anointing of the Holy Spirit
- “Those whom I love I reprove and chastise”
- “Behold I stand at the door and knock...”
- Painting by Holman Hunt “The Light of the World”

### The Reward (to the Victor)

- Christ will enter the victor’s house and dine with him
- He will sit with Christ on his throne

### Contemporary Application

- One of the worst offences against Christ is to be lukewarm toward faith
- Laodicia points out to us that:
  - Christ reproves those whom he loves
  - He has a deep desire for a relationship with us
  - We do not have what we need
  - Christ invites us to obtain everything from him

### Repentance

- From GK *metanoë* = to change one’s mind, indicating a radical change of direction
- This indicates both initial conversion and also repentance in the course of the Christian life
- Repentance requires:
  - 1) humility: to acknowledge the need for God
  - 2) honesty: admission of the wrong and/or the sin of omission
  - 3) sorrow for sin: contrition. Godly sorrow leads to change; worldly sorrow leads to self-condemnation and guilt
  - 4) renunciation: determination not to commit the sin again
  - 5) asking forgiveness from God (and the person we have wronged)
  - 6) making restitution